Eden 3 dialogue: Geoff Banks (2007)

Eden 3 dialogue. Transcript from the Collins & Goto Studio files, archived 2026.

GEOFF BANKS

INTERVIEWED BY REIKO GOTO AND ANNE DOUGLAS

13 JUNE 2007

Clean Verbatim Transcription
(Word-for-word transcription with some corrections and unnecessary or meaningless phrases, repetitions and stammering deleted).

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[ ] Text in square brackets should be checked for accuracy or spelling (for example, names) or for choice of words.

[ ] Text in *italics* enclosed in square brackets has been added or paraphrased to make grammatical sense; or to give additional information – please check.

[...] Three dots in square brackets indicate text that has been omitted – please check.

[?____] Inaudible.

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You did all the background (5:51)

Anne Douglas: ... on the background; how many trees are where and what is around?

Geoff Banks: Yes, that's right. It was very difficult, actually, in terms of ... Certainly in Scotland with the old Aberdeen one which I realise is [?_____].

But that was an ideal location. But the problem is – and this is what I find very frustrating – is that the City, in terms of its architecture, is very old. But in terms of its natural environment, it is very recent – and a lot of people don't realise that.

[0:35]

So, some of the oldest trees are from 1450 in there – a sycamore and an elm in Seaton Park. The oldest [?_____] is between 250 and 300 years. It's peanuts when you compare it with other cities – what we've got [?_____].

Anne Douglas: I see. Of course, Duncan was making that point.

Geoff Banks: Yes. So, in that respect, it was difficult but I was asked by the City Council to do an historical account of the trees, but I quickly found out when I did the research – there wasn't any. It's basically that most of the North East of Scotland had been clear-felled.

It was only until the Victorians decided that they want their parks, that the planting started to come back in except for a few exceptions, like in Seaton Park and a few other places where trees had survived because of private ownership.

[1:39]

Anne Douglas: Do you understand those references? Clear-felled …

Geoff Banks: I'm sorry Reiko.

Anne Douglas: Yes – [?_____].

Geoff Banks: [Do you see all those] areas when you look on that map there, because of meat for farming – they were just clear-felled [?_____] without any thought to the future.

Reiko Goto: But that has happened everywhere.

Geoff Banks: Yes, that's right.

Reiko Goto: I mean, I am coming from the other side, but in the US, a 250-year old tree – very old – and, strange, more native plants and trees exist there than here, but they're not so old. That is strange. So, everything was cut down for development a few times – but coming back, you know. There are still lots of new native plants coming back. So, community-wise, native communities are existing. But oldness is – I'm surprised that you say 250 years. That's really old!

Geoff Banks: Not for here – not for here.

Reiko Goto: So that's the kind of [environmental fact that] is really interesting.

Anne Douglas: Yes.

Geoff Banks: See, if you go down Perthshire which – as they call it locally – is Tree Country. You've got the Fortingall Yew which is claimed to be 5,000 years old – like your bristlecone pines in the States. But then, you have got your other sequoias and red cedars and things and some of those are now protected – but the more majority of them have gone, so much of [?_____] is ancient, but not only because it is protected now.

[3:42]

The irony of it, I think, is many of the trees that the [?_____] and others from the States have brought over from here – the original Scottish tree hunters – plant hunters – because many people from Scotland went out to the States and other countries – South America and South East Asia to bring these things back.

Many of the trees that we've got growing here which, maybe, are not so high or broad or whatever, are actually older than some of the trees in the States, because most of those have been felled.

Anne Douglas: Is this history written up?

Geoff Banks: It is incredible. And, again, I think, one of the reasons why I am so interested in trees – not only because they're so photogenic – is that they are, in terms of the natural environment, I

think they're the nearest thing – they're the thing that kind of ... We've got so many links with trees through history in terms of culture – good or bad. But you can relate because I think a lot of the things I like about trees – certainly mature oak trees – is, it puts man in their place; it puts people in their place in terms of what it is ...

Like you're saying a 250-year old tree – well, if you can imagine it had eyes and see history changing. There's nothing else around us that can actually do that. That puts some sense ... It makes us realise we're very transitory. Whereas a tree can be there for generations watching what's going on that changes.

When you speak to children about that as I have done on various projects, it really begins to open their eyes up to realise that there is so much more to life than their little kind of cosy concept.

Challenge (4:04)

Geoff Banks: So, in terms of something like [Meet a Tree] – just basically you put a scarf on a child so he can't see – disorientate him because you are actually in amongst lots of trees and basically what you're doing is, you're trying to take away temporarily their sight so they're having to use their other senses, and then take them to a tree and get them to feel it; smell it; hold it – whatever they feel that they want to do. And then you take them away from the tree. Disorientate them again, and say, "Well, which tree did you look at?" And immediately it begins to give them a kind of an empathy and a sense of kind of "Well, I've never done this before; I've never held a tree before; I've never touched a tree." Because, I mean, like – I suppose like yourself and my generation; we were forever falling out of trees.

We've got children now in a generation where, basically, they're forbidden to climb a tree; to do anything that is in a sense boisterous. So, these kids are deprived of that I'm trying to give them a sense that there's nothing wrong with climbing trees – sensibly.

[1:24]

So, in that respect, it is brilliant because it gives them a feeling and they can say, "Well, we can do this, because it is like within school. We can learn all about wildlife." But it is almost like it's sanitised.

So, what we can do in that respect is to try and give them ... It's their tree. Enjoy it. grow it and understand it.

I think also that the special thing about trees in the urban environment which, I suppose I feel kind of quite attached to – is trying to get people to understand that, where there is a tree, there's wildlife. It doesn't matter ... It may be [?_____] depending on the type of tree – but there's a tree there. They'll be supporting birds, insects, whatever it might be. It is [?_____]. A lot of people don't see it that way. It provides for children.

And on the other side of that, I think, is trying to get them to understand that ... A lot of people talk about peaty grassland as being kind of quaint and lush. Well, peaty grassland is dead. It's almost sterile.

[2:55]

Anne Douglas: Peaty? Lawn?

Geoff Banks: You stick a tree in there and let it grow for a while – there's going to be far more life on that tree than you'll find on the ground – apart from a few worms and a few insects because everything is cut and kept flush to the ground, so to speak.

Unless you actually allow the flowers and grasses and things to come up and mature, the insects don't have much chance or opportunity to actually interact whereas they do in a tree. So, you know – there's a whole seasonal thing there.

[3:32]

So, I just get the feeling that there is so much, and the fact is that (as an ecologist myself working in the city) I see people so much in terms of the ecology. A lot of people don't see them … They see themselves as separate, and I think a lot of ecologists see themselves as separate from ecology. But I think if you see yourself as separate from it, you've missed the point.

How did you find the trail? (9:33)

Anne Douglas: We can afford to reverse that. How did you go about finding this trail? Do you want to know …

Geoff Banks: Well, I've lived in the city for nearly 25 years so (I'm ex-airforce) and so I've always liked being outside and I just got to know the area. So, when I realised … When the City Council asked me to [?_____] the first trail, the ideal location actually was Old Aberdeen. So, I was looking basically from Mounthooly all the way down through to Seaton Park because, at the time, the City Council were wanting something to combine with the built environment, but then I realised very quickly that, as I basically knew then, there was no local history in terms of what went on with the trees apart from a couple in Seaton Park because everything else was relatively new plantings. Even the trees at the back of the Cathedral in the graveyard there – they're all turn of the last century because if you look at the George Washington photographs of the City and you look in the day, you can quickly work out what wasn't there or wasn't there at all, and you realise that so much of it is so new.

[1:43]

I think the other side of it – I feel about the City, and I think you mentioned it earlier and in terms of [?_____] – I very much got caught up with, not just the natural environment, but the built environment in terms of – how can I say it – having high regard for history that we tend to kind of blink, and it's gone, and we forget all about it. I mean, I kid myself now, whenever [?_____] – many other things since I've been in the City have kind of been and gone – like the Aberdeen Mart that was up in [Kidderbruster]. I mean – there was a whole way of life that was based within this city. You talk about how things are changing – [that was one of the things that I did take for the advancement of time just before they closed] *[that was one of the things that I thought indicated the advancement of time]*. And those things are kind of archives.

Anne Douglas: There was a cattle market there?

Geoff Banks: There was a cattle market there. Everything there. The farmers came into the city. I mean, it was just a way of life. It was just completely changed.

Anne Douglas: When did that change, then?

Geoff Banks: I remember it as being back '87, '88.

Anne Douglas: Yes, yes. I was talking about the Huntly Mart which one of our projects was based there. It was [?_____]. [?_____] farming in the area of of Lumsden, actually. And I ended up in the mart in Huntly filming the selling off of the cattle. Amazing, actually.

[3:34]

Geoff Banks: So, that is basically ... With this I also had a tree register which meant I obviously had a grid map with me to kind of work out its location like on a GPS, tree height, girth, and any other kind of attributes. At the same time, we launched a couple of press releases to try and encourage locals to come up with their favourite tree so that I could go and investigate those to see if there was any that I felt worthy to include in a future trail or, at least, if not on the trail, to put them in a register. So that is the way we worked.

Reiko Goto: How many trees are in the register?

Geoff Banks: At the moment there is about seventy-five.

Anne Douglas: Registered ... And what qualified them to be registered?

Geoff Banks: Basically, just in terms of its height and its age, its species, height, girth, or any other kind of unusual features or any kind of historical associations. We were just looking up [?_____].

[4:45]

Well, I checked out [Wild Bank] because I wanted to include some monkey puzzles in the trail and I've kind of set the criteria that those would be [?_____] trees as this was a tree [?_____] trail, there had to be three or more – but there are only two of them because I would have loved to have included them.

[5:06]

Anne Douglas: Yes. [There seems to be] more and more ... More tall.

Geoff Banks: There are some there, yes. But they're sequoias. But again, one of the issues I had with this trail was access. So it had to be in areas that ...

Anne Douglas: With public access.

Geoff Banks: Public access. Because some other trees that I did want to include were the oaks on Cornhill, but I wasn't getting permission to include them.

Anne Douglas: There are lots of complex issues.

Geoff Banks: There are, actually, in terms health and safety. Even the Council's huge commitment to cover themselves in terms of saying that's [street] trees.

[5:58]

What I don't like is the fact that a lot of the trees are ending up like one-side lollypop trees just so that they don't have to prune them for the next few years. But the thing is, if we get a drought year, like we've had already in terms of no rain in April, a lot of those trees were stressed and you can see them dying. It's a lot of money to replace those trees.

Anne Douglas: Because they've been ...

Geoff Banks: They've lopped them, basically. What we do in terms of ... When a tree [gets a lot of] growth in its crown, the crown drops down and grows up at the same time, you get a kind of crown lift. What you do, basically, is removing some of the lower branches, you ken, and you are shaping it slightly. Or what they do is kind of almost lop it by thirty, forty percent – sometimes the whole crown. Technically, you shouldn't do more than say, twenty per cent. So, [?_____]. You can just quickly see a tree in decline, struggling to ...

Reiko Goto: What branches gives more weight to hold ...

Geoff Banks: Yes. I mean, trees are incredibly complex organisms. People just think, you know, it's a lump of wood. [?_____] Association. When you go through the theory and everything, it is quite staggering. [Duncan will tell you. He did the exam recently.]

[7:39]

[?_____] *[Laughing]*

Anne Douglas: In terms of how they work?

Geoff Banks: Yes – just ... You know, the human body is incredibly complex and beautiful in the way it functions, but a tree is as well. I mean a lot of people don't realise that, say, like a tree is dying because it's got a disease. I mean, a lot of people say, "Oh, look, it's healed itself." But a tree never heals itself. It creates compartments around the diseased part of the tree so that, in a sense, you've got all the kind of ... There are various other kinds of – like tannins – within the bark and the wood that helps it keep pathogens at bay. But once they break down, the tree continues to go into decline, but it doesn't heal itself, as such. That is why you see wound wood around a branch that has been cut off to try and heal it. Sometimes that doesn't work and depending on how it has been cut or a branch has broken off in the wind or something, some of those spores can get in and they begin to break down the sapwood and then into the hardwood, and then the tree starts to die. That's life.

[9:05]

But then, having said that, and especially what I try and tell school teachers and pupils, just because a tree is dead, say in a park or somewhere, it doesn't mean you have to get rid of it. Dead wood is live wood as far as life is concerned because it still provides a home. So, you know, a lot of people think, "Oh, we can't have this wood here because it is dangerous, or it's not nice to look at."

Mimosa (2:44)

[The last part of the Mimosa section overlapped with the 'Why are trees important to us' section. Therefore, the two sections now follow each other, and then followed by the 'Lichen' section – see

table of contents.]

Geoff Banks: Think of a mimosa tree in terms of the fact [?_____]. If you think of all this against kind of very acute in terms of the way it reacts.

Anne Douglas: Reacts?

Geoff Banks: Well, if you like, if its leaves are open like that, and you touch it, they'll close up.

Anne Douglas: Gosh I lived with mimosa trees and I didn't know that. I lived in Africa. I didn't know that.

Reiko Goto: In Japan we call it 'nemu-no-ki'. 'Ki' means 'tree', and 'nemu' means 'sleep'.

Anne Douglas: Sleeping tree?

Reiko Goto: Sleeping tree. And, of course, as children we asked why it is called like that, and then we were told the story that if we touch it, the leaves go to sleep. It is not sleeping, but ... *[Like flowers closing their leaves for the night. K]*

Why are trees important to us? (6:49)

Geoff Banks: So, in a sense ... I think you want to play it carefully because if you start getting into the realms of Roald Dahl's stories and if you cut a tree down, you start crying and things like that.

That's what I would say, because some people kind of take it that way. It can go a bit the wrong way.

I think one other thing [?_____] talk about trees and the environment is the whole – and I ask children straight away, "What do you know about trees? Why are trees important for us?" And of course, they go, "They give us oxygen." I try and kind of tell them, that, yes, but they only give us oxygen during the day. Because a lot of them don't understand that the process reverses at night. And it is surprising the number of adults you speak to who never understood why their parents, or their grandparents, put plants up in their bedroom at night – for the reason of the fact that they're actually taking in oxygen and giving out CO_2. *[I knew the process reverses at night, but I'm a bit hazy about this. Why put plants in a bedroom at night (with the windows probably closed) if it breathes out CO_2 at night? K]*

Anne Douglas: Yes, I didn't make that connection – ha! Yes, yes. In fact, it is an interesting thought, but I haven't made that connection.

Geoff Banks: Kids have to understand it because people tend to kind of think that trees are kind *[oxygen]* power-plants. *[He said O_2 power-plants – oxygen's symbol is simply 'O' and 'O power-plants' sound silly.]*

I mean, Bush's kind of concept of working round the Kyoto Agreement was to plant masses of the trees – but, you know, it doesn't work that way because trees can only take so much CO_2 and, likewise, with everything, there's a balance.

Anne Douglas: A relationship, yes.

Reiko Goto: Right.

[1:48]

Reiko Goto: But that is just one thing, yes? It is not everything. You know, sometimes the people just start thinking, well only, global warming issue ... I mean, that CO_2 should ... It is a global warming issue. It is not the CO_2 – it is about our lifestyle. How we pursue ...

Geoff Banks: Well, there is that. But I think one of the biggest issues here, really, is not so much CO_2. It is water vapour – huge amounts of water vapour. Because it actually has the same effect. But that is not an issue that is kind of raised.

Anne Douglas: How do you mean?

Geoff Banks: Well, if you just look at what happened in the last two weeks there's been kind of no sunlight. We've just been covered in cloud. I'm not affected by SAD, but you just feel so trapped by sunless days.

Anne Douglas: How will trees affect that?

Geoff Banks: There is a balance in there. I mean, as you say, there's not many trees. But, obviously, trees – through transpiration – soak up huge amounts of water and provide water vapour into the sky. So, there's a balance there in terms of kind of water vapour. Because, as I say, you could say, if you were to plant enough trees, you could have huge cloud formations.

Reiko Goto: They release the water much slower. It will make another reservoir like, that's why the cloud – the growing cloud. On the surface – it holds the water, and then it returns back to the ocean much slower.

[3:34]

Geoff Banks: Did you ever read the story about the man who planted trees?

Anne Douglas: I haven't yet.

Reiko Goto: No, I haven't.

Geoff Banks: It is a beautiful story about a man who lived in the hills of France amongst the lavender I think just prior to the First World War and he saw that all the poor people were desperately cutting down the trees to produce charcoal to try and make some kind of money to get back into the cities to make a living for themselves and the whole area just begin to dry up and he basically thought that, as a shepherd, that he was going to just plant new trees. And for years and years before the First World War (or the Second World War) he just kept planting trees – millions of them – and created a huge forest. And then, basically after the Second World War [?_____] the local mayor came along and said, "This forest is wonderful. Where did it come from? It's marvellous." Not knowing that this lowly shepherd has created these trees. And he had kind of disappeared after the war. [?_____] issued in France in terms of what happened during the Second World War when they collaborated with the Germans. And then the people started realising there is this huge forest, and they wanted to tame it; and then slowly people started moving into the forest and actually living in it. And people said, "There's water here" because the trees had actually

started to draw up the water from the mountain, from the hills [where it should have been – I suppose for 75 years].

But it is just a wonderful simple story of just how this man planted trees despite all the different things that had gone on around the world in terms of the two world wars.

Reiko Goto: Yes, that is a lovely [?_____].

Geoff Banks: I just get this [?_____].

Anne Douglas: [?_____] very well.

[5:59]

Geoff Banks: But it is just that sense of people saying, "Oh, it's here. It's come from nowhere." I mean, "I claim it for our city" or whatever. It was just this one man's [faithfulness] *[belief]* in planting all these trees – knowing what to plant when and how.

Anne Douglas: And, as an individual, having quietly having this amazing impact.

Geoff Banks: Yes, that's true. I know – it is a fictional story – but he dies and nobody is saying, "Well, where has the forest come from?"

[But there's [?_____] duty [?_____]. If you come round, we can actually show it to you, but the French in Edinburgh [?_____] [?_____] playing it [?_____] not so long ago.]

Lichen (0:20)

Geoff Banks: It gets to kind of work out what these things mean and … I think that's the thing, in the sense of saying, "Oh, well, you understand at one level that lichens grow on the north side of the tree, because they don't want direct sunlight." But then you can use it for yourself in terms of understanding what …

Different relationship between man and nature (6:29)

Anne Douglas: One of the things that Reiko summarised her research by is actually trying to create a different relationship between human beings and nature – really, changing the balance in a highly [?_____]. You know, mostly our relationship with nature is functional – we use it – and that has probably been our survival mechanism from hunting and gathering all the way through to …

And suddenly, maybe now, we're crossing a threshold into a moment in human history in which the very thing that has allowed us to survive – our major ability to develop technologies to intervene in nature has actually become a threat, that we need this huge *[effort]* to turn that around.

[1:06]

Geoff Banks: Well, I think one's biggest problem there is really in terms of algae and the like is to … *[interruption]* we're not looking … We are always looking to meet our needs in the short-term and therefore a lot of things that we do to meet our needs in actual terms, have dire long-term consequences that we're not aware of [and we're going headlong into the consequences].

Reiko Goto: I am not really trying to say, "Don't cut the trees." It is not the issue here. It's not like I'm trying to be another tree-hugger.

Geoff Banks: No, I understand that. It is just in terms of trying in get ... You can speak to one part of the community or society as a whole, but others will continue the way they're doing things because [?_____]. In terms of saying, "Well, we can develop this" I don't think it brings us [?_____] trying to deal with developers. You know, they go into a lovely tree area with lots of fun habitats, and they will just desecrate the trees because there is no thought on how they can build around the trees in a way that enhances the area.

[2:42]

So, a lot of the kind of thought for history relates to the environment there that we're talking about, is just lost. And as I have said a few times at various meetings and things I've had with the council, "The tree was there first."

Reiko Goto: Yes, for a long time.

Geoff Banks: And, in some ways, if a tree is allowed to continue to mature and grow, then it probably could outlive the building. So ... It is just trying to find the balance because I think one of the other things that happens in terms of the open environment in terms of development, is there is this attitude whereof, "It is only a tree. It is only one tree." The last Tree Officer used to remind me that, "Well, it might be only one tree, but there are 365 days in a year – so there are 365 trees in a year that are felled to meet the needs in terms of development or something". And a lot of these are mature trees. And because there is so much pressure on sites now to create new expensive developments for, I suppose, [?_____] or whatever – those with all the money – who want a tree there or something – that's nice. It is all limited, because the fact is, the attitude is like, well, we create very small footprint areas for trees to grow which, actually, the buildings themselves don't allow the trees to mature even though they planted them.

[4:33]

So we end up chopping fairly large mature trees that should have been protected and enhanced as a forethought in terms of the development in order to keep them for many years. Instead, they fell the mature tree and plant a new tree that lasts, maybe, five years, and no more trees are planted.

The knock-on effect is that we have a net deficit of trees which is ongoing in the city because we are still planting new trees because of vandalism, disease, many other things – lack of maintenance – these trees don't mature and so we end up with ... Some trees come into maturity, but the majority don't. And the trees that we do have – there's no management in terms of post-management – or, I should say, future management. And it is, "Well, what are we going to replace these trees with?" So, we end up with maybe lots of rowans, cherries and cotoneaster trees. And they're all nice, safe trees; they're decorative; you don't have to maintain them very much. But we've lost our diversity.

Anne Douglas: So, how would you envision tackling that?

Geoff Banks: Yes, that's where we started, really. But the irony of it really is the fact that [?_____]. But it operates like a kind of headless machine, sometimes, I think.

Unfortunately (4:25)

Geoff Banks: Unfortunately, one of the things (I try not to get too cynical about it) is the sense where (Aberdeen is very good and I imagine other cities are similar) – is that, we like to create this kind of image – we can create literature and all sorts of things to tell people what we've got, but kind of through the backdoor we get rid of all of it. But the fact that we've got the information there, is all that's important.

Anne Douglas: That's an interesting thought.

Geoff Banks: If you see what I mean. So it is almost like we're creating a veneer – we're creating ... It is almost surreal, in a sense. Because we're saying it is there, but it is not. But as long as we've got something to kind of show somehow that we're greenish, but we're not really green in terms of the environment. That's all we need to worry about because the issues aren't really the environment, the issues are really development and industry.

[0:59]

Reiko Goto: Right. But, on the other hand, history – because of the economy – has an ability to make it better by ... Last night we went to an exhibition in Inverness about green buildings. It is money ... They're taking [a lot of] things, but it is not just information, it is not just that it is a quantity [?_____]. It is more about life, how we relate to other lives. It is not just ...

Geoff Banks: Yes, it is a way of life. But the thing is, you can get funding from a lot of these organisations like the oil companies – they'll give you money if they feel it fits within their remit. But, in a way (I don't like really saying it), but it is almost a bit like [?_____] money.

Reiko Goto: Yes, I understand it.

Anne Douglas: Yes, I think that is absolutely true. And there are ethical issues about, I suppose, accepting money from companies that also have very bad [?_____]. We've had a small amount of sponsorship from Shell, partly because of [?_____] Marco. Do you know [Marco]? From the Woodend Barn.

Geoff Banks: Oh, that's right. [Marco]? Yes, I do. They came round a few weeks ago to see us.

Anne Douglas: Yes. He is a great man, actually. [?_____] I think there are very interesting people there. And [Marco] has been very interested in art and ecology and he came to the house and gave a lecture and contributed.

[2:59]

Helen and Newton Harrison came to see us just over a year ago to launch a project that they're doing called 'Greenhouse Britain' and [Marco] – it was really the chance to work with [Mark] and his ideas and building relationships. But before [?_____] but since then a lot of the people in the art-world have very publicly denounced [?_____] for ever having accepted that funding. It's a bit extreme – but ...

Geoff Banks: Strange. Because, I mean, Fiona has actually asked me to do a project out there.

Anne Douglas: At Woodend Barn?

Geoff Banks: Yes.

Anne Douglas: Marvellous.

Geoff Banks: I'm trying to get my head around it. Maybe I need to speak to you a bit more in terms of trying to interact between what I've got there in terms of what the future development. They have a restaurant there as well. They've got allotments there – new allotments; they've got [?_____] and woodlands on the site. So, we're trying to interlink that in terms of an environmental art project.

Anne Douglas: Marvellous. That could be very interesting.

Indigenous (2:09)

Anne Douglas: How do you ... This is a question that we came in with with the conversation ... In terms of deciding on what is indigenous or non-indigenous – or native trees, and non-native.

Geoff Banks: Well, it's interesting that you should say that because that is something ... I used to know that area ... I'm quite concerned that ecologists and other kinds of related fields where people kind of keep talking about trees (or wildlife in terms of whether they are native or not native) has kind of negative connotations in terms of communities because, like Aberdeen, say – a huge influx of people from all over the world – Poland, Romania – [?_____] people. [He said], "Well, this is native, this is not native." It kind of trickles down to people, eventually. To politics. And I feel we have to be very careful.

[1:03]

But my attitude is basically, if it is a tree and it is a tree in the right place – then fine. You know, there's no problem. There are lots of organisations still who stick with the idea that it has to be native. But the thing is, a lot of the time, we don't know what is native because some of these species now are from technically unknown provenances – I mean, like a lot of Scots pine in this country are actually general purpose. And you've had other organisations that have actually been chopping them down to plant so-called Scottish [?_____], but what guarantee have you that they're actually Scottish?

So, the way I see it, I kind of got the [?_____] when I was at Uni about this was that we should see things from being future native – not keep looking back ...

Reiko Goto: That's great, yes, that's great.

Trees have been registered (10:45)

Reiko Goto: You said that seventy five trees are registered in their location is on the GPS, right? Do you use a map?

Geoff Banks: What I've done, is kept it as a register, because that was all I was required to provide. What I was looking for, in a sense, was more funding, then I can take it a stage further and can, as you say, get a whole map of that.

Reiko Goto: I am interested in … I have a little background in [OS] – not fully, but I've worked with [conservationists] – so, making a tree map in Aberdeen might be interesting.

Geoff Banks: I mean, I could be able to create a basic map for you in terms of if you want to take it on yourself to find out where the trees are, but they're all in locations beside the park.

Reiko Goto: Or do you already have data [on the registered ones]?

Anne Douglas: So, the database could link up with [?_____] software?

Geoff Banks: Oh, it doesn't work that way. This is just on a spreadsheet. It has just got basically the tree, its location (grid reference) and other kinds of related information in terms of the tree, height, girth, and any special information.

Anne Douglas: I wonder how …

Reiko Goto: I guess, I'm hesitating to ask because I'm really … But, if you have the time, can you show me your trail? You know, one of them, and then tell me the story about it? I am trying to understand it as an experience. Am I asking too much?

Anne Douglas: You want him to go with you on a walk?

Geoff Banks: Yes, I would love to do that.

Anne Douglas: That would be good.

Reiko Goto: Thank you!

Geoff Banks: I think that would be the best starting point. We go with that, and then you can see what we look at and talk about. We can look at other parts of the city.

Anne Douglas: Yes – I wonder what sort of information [Jonathan] [?_____] … Is that too wild and woolly?

Reiko Goto: [?_____]

Anne Douglas: Do you know [Jonathan Ward] from the Macaulay [?_____] Centre? [Jonathan] used to be here, actually, and he is now leading a research team at Macaulay. He has actually done a huge amount of work in terms of computer-generated modelling of landscapes. Mostly for very functional reasons to envisage what wind-farms are going to look like on the landscape and to communicate with the public in relationship to that.

[3:25]

But we … Actually, we explored a lot of very wild and woolly ideas. One was the development of a project that we did with Cullen House which has to do with the discovery of a piece of heritage – a painted ceiling that was lost in a fire – and we reconstructed it digitally with a map of [?_____]. And we really wanted to develop … If you can imagine, the sort of issues that you are raising about interaction and feeling your way into a story, we wanted the ceiling to be particularly rich in stories by the way of getting people to engage with new storytelling; taking the stories into the future – particularly to people who do not belong to this culture.

And they were very excited about any research that deals with interactivity – and they mean interactivity – not in this sort of [?_____], but they literally mean how people will respond to a digital tools.

But they used GIS mapping as the basic framework on which to build, what are actually very convincing landscapes, and I identified where they were from this computer model, because I've walked some of that landscape.

It is very [capitulated], but it is still very [?_____].

Reiko Goto: [?_____] 3D model is a little bit [?_____] then if we want to ask them, we have to raise the funding, yes?

Anne Douglas: All of this is predicated on the fact that, if a project came forward, we would have to find somebody to do it. It is not a kind of instant ...

Geoff Banks: Yes, I understand that.

Anne Douglas: I know. And it ...

Reiko Goto: If we planned it, it would be a really good resource.

Anne Douglas: [I think they don't have problems raising research funding and they were ... Curiously, interestingly, the mayor, called [Joy] [?_____], two-dimensional environment as we were in the landscape. But it would add a dimension and I think what they've struggled with is exactly the concept that you both had which is the real reason why you would use [?_____].]

[6:17]

I mean, [?_____]. But, I've been in a room with twenty people and a screen of two thirds of this wall, and you are in the environment. It is as good as I've ever seen, actually. Very interesting stuff.

Geoff Banks: Because there is something I spent my life about because, in a sense, for me, it is very much storytelling – in the traditional [sense]. But I see myself as a storyteller in pictures. But it is trying to bring it around in a way that there is continuity and depth and, like you say, maybe even three-dimensional, in a sense, where people are not only just seeing to supplement the imagination – because you don't want to take away from the imagination, because that is part of it.

[7?07]

Reiko Goto: Right – exactly. Last time we talked to [Jonathan], he showed us the possibilities, so we can combine the outcome – what we are interested in, so that the 3D-model of a tree ... Because a tree – the duration of the time we are experiencing it, it is very wide and long, right? And it has to give the same experience to the audience. So, inside, we showed the 3D-model, how what is happening around one tree and around the tree – [what they hear, how the feel,] *[the trees or the people? K]* and then after people experienced the condensed story, you open the door and you go outside and you see actual trees – outside of the city – you see the connections. That is what we talked about, but [Jonathan] – he is still ... He is largely [?_____].

Anne Douglas: [?_____] approving the actual tour – very practical, but I think they know that, through connections, [?_____] psychologists, they know … [Stuart] was at the Artlink point, because he got terribly excited with exactly that point of how you might create a space for people to become very imaginatively engaged, and very sensorily engaged.

Geoff Banks: But not distracted by the story itself.

Anne Douglas: They're not distracted from the story itself. In this case, we put a whole proposal together which is getting people to give a remit. In that ceiling, there are iconographic images of [?_____] and Neptune and Gaia and Mercury, and then a narrative element of the siege of Troy and the stories of Diana and Actaeon. But if you didn't know the classical stories …

[9:19]

Or, when we first encountered the ceiling, actually, or the archive (what limited archive there was – all of that – 9/11 had just happened) and all of that – the siege of Troy – linked it immediately. This whole idea of invading the city through deceptive means. It was like a re-enactment of …

That wasn't to do with the environment or ecology, except in there is the figure of Gaia. That was one way of … And they got very interested in it. They got very interested in the whole potential of testing interactivity in an entirely new context. This would be much closer to their [?_____] interest.

[We sort of lagged behind because we hadn't [?_____]. Well, partly it was having this kind of conversation with [?_____] knowledge you have the issue …]

So, I know, that is one strand of thinking that we could [?_____]. [?_____] this idea of how do we re-educate ourselves to think differently about this relationship about the environment.

Potential (8:13)

Geoff Banks: Yes, there is a lot of potential there because, I think one of the other things is that it is trying to reach the [?_____] of children. Because children – certainly primary school – is as susceptible as adults, in a sense, because, ok, we still need to touch their parents and grandparents in terms of what you're doing, but in a way, they're the ones that will be making decisions tomorrow.

If we're looking at exceptionally [?_____], we need to get people to understand what is going on so that they can actually make …

[Interruption]

[Just in terms of [?_____] of the people that can accept the decisions or go along] because I think many people tend to rely, say in a local authority like Aberdeen and I suppose like with the Government – they go to the experts in terms of finding information, but at the end of the day you still have to make your own decision in terms of what do you think is right.

I think it is trying to give more information to people so that you are not always relying on experts – if that makes sense – because, I think, sometimes experts can be so blinkered in terms of the way they perceive things – if that makes sense.

Reiko Goto: [Really, and especially these days, the work side is so well-developed there and you are relying too much. It just get you to put it there and then – *[clap]* – you can forget about it.]

[1:58]

Geoff Banks: But if you can get your place where you are beginning to influence the decision-makers on a human level – even on a family-level in terms of family and children – that's going to have an effect on the future. Whereas if you try and get them to work on an executive level, this pile is going to go to the top.

Reiko Goto: And then it becomes so mechanical. You know, it really becomes becomes like lightbulb.

Geoff Banks: Precisely, yes.

Reiko Goto: Last time, Duncan was talking about Aberdeen. People are very apathetic about nature, and that is probably the hardest part to talk to people about this.

Geoff Banks: You need a much more kind of hands-on experience because, unfortunately, I think what happens there – a lot of the problem is to do with the council and its history, is that many people born into the city, have been, [?_____], "Well, it's the council's responsibility. It's not a local responsibility." That's changing, but very slowly.

[3:41]

There are many people in the council who still don't want to let go of the way things have been because they don't want the general public to have greater influence in terms of decision-making and I think it's where people outwith, say the council, in other kinds of organisations or individuals can begin to kind of make an input. It might reverse ... [Even within the council], planning departments tend to be a bit more flexible in terms of reaching people. You know, it's got its own kind of agenda, so to speak.

But it is trying to get them to follow through and understand, if you spend money, you've got to bring some continuity to it. Because, it is very difficult to get councils to understand that there is integrity involved.

Reiko Goto: Right – integrity yes.

Geoff Banks: You know, in terms of – you said that you're going to do this. You've got to follow it through.

Reiko Goto: Yes. Even if small things start working, other things will follow. Like [?_____] architecture could follow [?_____] too. So, there are some possibilities ...

Geoff Banks: But even if, in a sense like Robert Gordon University as a whole, took that as an ethos.

Reiko Goto: Yes, that is another thing that I've been thinking about. You know, this [?_____] and start working at the maps and look at the trees [?_____] because of the planning; because of some of the buildings – they will be demolished and then you see from the walking bridge there,

right? That could be developed again – so, if something can be saved, now is the time for identifying them.

[5:53]

Geoff Banks: Well, between you and me – ironically, a lot of the trees were actually felled for the creation of buildings in the last few years.

Reiko Goto: I know, and it really concerns me, yes. Nobody cares about it, so nobody does anything. Now is the time to say. It should be saved or planted in some areas.

[6:15]

Geoff Banks: There is some very important wildlife going on here [near the rivers].

Reiko Goto: Yes, yes.

Geoff Banks: Because I think the other side of that – the other important thing is (it depends how you do it) – is interpretation. Providing interpretation for [?_____]. Another way in which people can see the art-work if people understand what is going on.

Even if it is in terms of the campus – get the campus to … Even though there is a no kind [?_____] department here at all? Biology, natural history?

Reiko Goto: Not that kind – no. Architecture – unfortunately, no biology department.

Geoff Banks: But you use the resources that are here – the natural resources, in terms of providing an interpretation of what is here on the campus.

Reiko Goto: That is very important. [?_____].

[AD returning]

Reiko Goto: We talked about the campus, here.

Geoff Banks: Well, just in terms of the fact is that it has had a history in terms of felling a lot of trees unnecessarily; things not thought through properly; wild life got rid of at different points (badgers and things) – in that sense it is history, but there is the sense in, "Well, what can we do now?" I'm saying, ["Well, [?_____] university has an interpretation course."]

elm trees (5:31)

Reiko Goto: Are there lots of elm trees here – or are they very rare because of the disease?

Geoff Banks: Yes, I should say, actually, that in addition to say, Edinburgh, Aberdeen has got one of the largest elm populations in the north of Europe.

Reiko Goto: Oh, wow! [That is a good point.]

Geoff Banks: So that is one of the reasons why we created the elm Trail because we just wanted to highlight the fact that it is one of the resources we do have in terms of trees but, potentially, we could [look at it] in the next couple of years because most of the trees we have here are wych elm which is

native Scots elm. Because it is not affected by disease in the same way that English elm is because the wych elm is actually genetically diverse, whereas the English elm is a clone. So, if one tree is affected, the whole [clone] will die because if you plant one tree of English elm and create a hedgerow, then one just plant up *[that tree]* and create new trees all the way along. So, if one of those trees dies, then the rest of the trees will follow. *[Only if it dies due to disease which will spread easily to the other genetically similar elms – he makes it sound as though they will all die in sympathy regardless of the cause of death. K]*

Reiko Goto: Gosh.

Geoff Banks: [Basically it is just the root system and chemistry and kind of …] So, whereas in the wych elm, each tree is genetically different, so it has a better chance to resist because it regenerates by seed. The English one can, but most of the time it does it by cloning.

Anne Douglas: How interesting.

Geoff Banks: Another one that I've been dealing with this project is – I like sycamore trees. A lot of people don't like sycamores because they see them as being invasive. But as more and more knowledge is coming through now, people are actually changing their attitude towards it. Because seeing that they're not actually introduced trees to the UK, but the fact is that they probably were native to Scotland in the first place because in Europe you see they are a bit like the rowan – they're a mountain tree. And they actually worked their way down south, but not the other way round. So you find that the older sycamore trees are actually here in Scotland. The younger ones are further south.

Anne Douglas: I recently moved into town and I inherited a strip of garden which the previous owners just barked over and planted one or two trees because they lived in a flat and the people had rented accommodation. But the sycamores have seeded phenomenally.

Geoff Banks: Yes, they do.

Anne Douglas: There's no evidence of a sycamore around, but …

Geoff Banks: Oh, right.

Anne Douglas: I have been trying to get rid of them. A friend of mine has this small croft up near Turriff and I keep offering her these sycamores, and she says, "No, no – no more sycamores." I've been planting them in one corner of the garden – just moving them because I can't …

Geoff Banks: Well, I'll take them off you if you want, because what I've been encouraging the tree wardens to do is to put up tree nurseries.

Anne Douglas: Right?

Geoff Banks: So, instead of actually planting new seeds, just take the seedlings from where we don't want them. Just replant them.

Anne Douglas: Ok, I'll replant them.

Reiko Goto: Now in Britain – I mean, in the US – sycamore is one of the trees you cannot use. Is it here as well? I mean, log it and then use it to make some furniture as well.

Geoff Banks: It is a very good wood. Certainly, years ago it was used all the time for kind of kitchen things – kitchen implements.

Anne Douglas: Oh, really.

Reiko Goto: So, we never … I mean, we can't find it in B&Q. *[Laughing.]*

Geoff Banks: Well, that's right, because it is a hardwood. I mean, the Forestry Commission have been using sycamore because it is fast-growing as a kind of early hardwood crop. So they're actually making forests of sycamore, so that they can actually get a return on their wood quite quickly – because it is a hardwood and they can get more money from that than planting conifers, because you get better kind of quality conifers in Europe than you do, say, here.

But when you get trees like this that are allowed to grow up as [?_____] trees – like this sycamore and through seeds, you understand just what it is about. It is quite powerful.

Reiko Goto: It is beautiful.

Geoff Banks: Plus the fact that sycamores have huge biomass that [it sits on]. There's not much diversity, but there is a huge biomass and lots of birds rely on sycamores for feeding and shelter.

Seaton Park (0:29)

Geoff Banks: Seaton Park goes back to, probably, about the end of the 16th century. So, it is one of the oldest parks in the city – but, obviously, in the sense that it is Old Aberdeen.

What I like about Seaton Park is the fact that it sits beside the Don, so it is the only park in the City which actually has a river on its edge. I mean, [Duthie has in the sense that … Ok, you've got a road there, but it makes it a very special park].

Everything was covered (0:53)

Geoff Banks: So, in terms of the environment and being in the city – everything is covered. There is so much history relating to burns and the culverts and things like that, and if you look through the history, it is incredible what went on because most of these burns and things – we've got culverts now. People had access to the waters to do all sorts of things – but now they're covered.

So, in a sense, it's trying to get people to realise it. There are things down below going on – under the roads – in terms of history. Because, if you follow through down through Seaton Park down to the beach, you can actually follow the [Palace grounds] which goes past where we are past the university, and then goes out to …

Two rivers (2:04)

Geoff Banks: Of course, the other side of it in terms of, I think … One of the things that Aberdeen undersells itself for is the fact that it is a very unique city, it is the fact that it has two major [ports].

Anne Douglas: Two major [?_____] and phenomenal access to the landscape. Because, when Reiko first came, she said to me, half of the land of the countryside come into the city and I have never thought of it until I was walking (I was collecting my car from the Tullos Industrial Estate and decided to walk along the railway line and ended up crossing the river and actually seeing where

Duthie Park finished, and then the green-space, and then the green-space on the other side of the bank and it just suddenly struck me that, actually, you could walk almost from there all the way through to Banchory.

Geoff Banks: Yes, that's right.

Anne Douglas: And, having moved from the country where I could walk in a landscape that you probably wouldn't have dreamed for [?_____] if you really sort of … You know, moving to the city was a big deal. But it is possible to do this walk [carrying through] trees [?_____] park that you can actually walk, and then there's a railway line and then there's the road.

Geoff Banks: I mean, the council is in the process of trying to find a way of extending access into the countryside, but it is difficult. But it is improving.

I know somebody, [Nick] [Hemworth], in terms of the outside of things and the environment so that people can actually find these routes, take it out into the countryside, away from the city so that the city doesn't become just a kind of defined boundary and I think one of the main concerns about this [?_____] in the sense that that would be almost like creating a cut-off.

It is beautiful (2:27)

Reiko Goto: That is beautiful. And all the stories to talk about.

Geoff Banks: Yes, you know, that's the thing I find difficult as a photographer, because in a sense it is not just individual photographs – it is more in terms of the a narrative – a story. People say, "Oh, we want the picture", and I say, "Don't worry about it" but often you can't just take a picture [of a situation], you know.

Because I struggle sometimes in terms of taking photographs and thinking, "Right, well, you want to take a picture that holds a space; that tells you about itself." But what you don't realise is that people bring their own interpretation.

Reiko Goto: Yes. Your picture really opens up. It speaks and what you know about [things]. You have something and it is not just nipped from the air and then [?_____].

Anne Douglas: Yes. Reiko's [?_____].

Geoff Banks: Yes, because like you're saying – like that one with the butterfly wings. Now, I mean, when you think that that is just rust. It could be a woodland, as you say, [or perhaps] butterfly wings.

Reiko Goto: Connections – that is what we're looking for from the environment.

Geoff Banks: But I called this one [?_____] I call these abstracts [?_____] project. Just trying to get people to look, to see. There will be things that they wouldn't normally look at. They'll just walk by.

Reiko Goto: Our life is so busy. We never have time to look at things.

Anne Douglas: But interestingly enough – that whole idea that we're occupying the surface of information and thinking about actual knowledge and actually, unless it is taken into like experience …

Geoff Banks: Yes, I realise it all the time [?_____] internet. The more knowledge you have, the more knowledgeable you are – it is quite the reverse. You have got to kind of stop flooding yourself and think what to retain and what is important.

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